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PART I

SIR FRANCIS BACON'S THEORY OF CIVIL HISTORY-WRITING

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Criticism of Bacon has quite naturally and properly been centered upon his activity as a philosopher, scientist, and essayist. Yet if the recent effort to re-evaluate his worth as a thinker and writer is to be complete, some consideration must be given to a minor but neglected subject, his theory of history-writing. Although he never elaborated his theory in an independent essay, his scattered pronouncements deserve to be studied both for their intrinsic importance and for the light they shed on his relation with his intellectual milieu. During the Renaissance the *ars historica* came to be a popular and well-defined critical genre; consequently additional insight into the character and relative novelty of Bacon's thought may be gained by comparing his theory of history-writing with others of his age. Furthermore, a knowledge of Bacon's ideas about the proper nature, function, and composition of history should enable a modern reader to interpret and judge *The History of Henry VII* more accurately. Finally, a person's conception of the way the past should be described and its utility for the present is necessarily an important part of his general philosophy.

Bacon divides Civil History into ecclesiastical, literary or

intellectual, and civil or political.¹ This article is concerned with civil or political history, the only division about which Bacon theorized at any length. Today such a limitation would be artificial. Modern historiography and historical theory are distinguished for their breadth of scope; all human activities are legitimate subjects for the historian, and in interpreting the past he utilizes many diverse learnings and emphasizes the inter-relations of intellectual, religious, political, social, economic, or physical activities. In Bacon's time this was significantly not so. Purely political history was then held in greatest repute and the *artes historicae* deal mainly with it. For that reason, our limitation of subject is not arbitrary as it would be today.

Bacon's most general statement about history occurs in his classification of human learning according to the three mental faculties. "History has reference to the Memory, poesy to the Imagination, and philosophy to the Reason."² If this is to be regarded as anything more than a convenient encyclopedic classification, two important questions are suggested by Bacon's reference of history to the memory. First, did he mean to imply that history should be the exclusive product of memory, a mere record to be judged solely on its factual accuracy and inclusiveness? Secondly, did Bacon mean to rank the products of the mental faculties according to the conventional hierarchy of the faculties themselves, in which reason stood at the top? Specifically, did he regard history as inferior to philosophy, if not to poetry, and what limitations did he see in it?

The first step in answering these questions is to examine the explanations which Bacon added in the *Descriptio Globi Intellectualis* (1612) and the *De Augmentis* (1622-23) to his bare statement which had appeared in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). These two explanations have in common a description of the process of cognition. Discrete sense impressions are recorded by the memory.

These the human mind proceeds to review and ruminate; and thereupon either simply rehearses them, or makes fanciful imitations of

¹ *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. Spedding, Ellis, and Heath (Boston, 1860-1864) 8. 418 ff. This is the edition hereafter referred to as *Works*.

² *Ibid.* 8. 407; 6. 182; 10. 403.

them, or analyzes and classifies them. Wherefore from these three fountains, Memory, Imagination, and Reason, flow these three emanations, History, Poesy, and Philosophy; and there can be no others. For I consider history and experience to be the same thing, as also philosophy and the sciences.³

Here history is clearly defined as the bare rehearsal of mentally recorded sense impressions, and hence the exclusive product of the memory. It is distinguished from poetry by being true rather than feigned, and from philosophy by being composed of unanalyzed sensations rather than general notions.

Is there any evidence that this was not Bacon's final and considered opinion? First, it should be noticed that he was not wholly satisfied with the conventional faculty psychology upon which the foregoing conception of history is based. In *The Advancement of Learning* he observed that ". . . that part of inquiry is most necessary, which considereth the *seats* and *domiciles* which the several faculties of the mind do take and occupy in the organs of the body; which knowledge hath been attempted, and is controverted, and deserveth to be much better enquired."⁴ Eighteen years later he added significantly in the *De Augmentis*: "Neither again is that arrangement of the intellectual faculties (imagination, reason, and memory) according to the respective ventricles of the brain, destitute of error"; for "the origins of these faculties ought to be handled, and that physically. . . . In which part nothing of much value . . . has as yet been discovered. . . ."⁵ More important is a statement by Bacon proving that by 1623 he was favorably disposed towards the theory of cognition held by Telesius and his followers in which the three faculties are not separated but rather unified to form the Thinking Faculty.

. . . one of the moderns has ingeniously referred all the powers of the soul to motion, and remarked on the conceit and precipitancy

³ *Ibid.* 8. 408; 10. 403-5.

⁴ *Ibid.* 6. 240.

⁵ *Ibid.* 9. 22-3, 51.

Compare Huarte's puzzlement caused by an anatomy of the brain which revealed no difference in substance or appearance in the three ventricles. *Examen de Ingenios*, Cap. 8 (*Biblioteca de Autores Españolas*, Madrid, 1913, 65.434), or in the Renaissance English translation which Bacon may have known, although he nowhere mentions Huarte, *The Examination of Mens Wits* (London, 1594), pp. 54-55.

of some of the ancients, who in too eagerly fixing thir eyes and thoughts on the memory, imagination, and reason, have neglected the Thinking Faculty, which holds the first place. For he who remembers or recollects, thinks; he who imagines, thinks; he who reasons, thinks; and in a word the spirit of man, whether prompted by sense or left to itself, whether in the functions of the intellect, or of the will and affections, dances to the tune of the thoughts. . . .⁶

It is fairly clear, then, that by 1623 at the latest, Bacon had become dissatisfied with the mechanical and oversimplified faculty psychology and that he was looking for an explanation that took into account the unity and complexity of the process of cognition. Consequently, not much confidence can be placed in his statement that history is the exclusive product of the memory, nor in his implication that the historian is a mere recorder. Perhaps the chief source of confusion is Bacon's use of the word *history* to denote both the collection of evidence with which the historian should work, and the final synthesis of those materials. It will become clear as we proceed that Bacon was careful to distinguish the historian from the recorder, and to characterize his work as the product of the whole mind rather than of one faculty. It is significant that Bacon saw no need to explain carefully his assignment of history to the memory. Today such an act would identify one with a definite party, those who assert that the historian can properly do little more than accumulate factual evidence. In Bacon's time the lines were not so sharply drawn; the problem did not exist in its modern form.

The second question raised by Bacon's classification of learning according to the three faculties is whether he intended

⁶ *Ibid.* 8. 543-54.

"One of the moderns" is said by Bacon's editors to be A. Donius. He was a follower of Telesius, the only Renaissance encyclopedist whom Bacon respected. (Cf. *Works*, 1. 103, 10. 391; and Virgil K. Whitaker, *Bacon and the Renaissance Encyclopedists*, Stanford University doctoral dissertation, 1933, p. 27.) Telesius likewise objected to the faculty psychology and advocated in its place a theory of cognition based on memory and motion. The sense of the difficult Latin seems to be this. Sensations excite a kind of mental activity which can later be revived because it forms a pattern. When any fragmentary part presents itself to us, the totality is recalled by filling out the pattern that has been established in our mind as a sort of habit. The intelligence, then, is really memory rather than pure reason. (*De rerum natura*, a cura di Vincenzo Spampinato, Modena, 1910, 3. 89-90.) On the similarity of the psychological theories of Telesius and Bacon, see G. S. Brett, *A History of Psychology* (London, 1921) 2. 148.

thereby to rank history, the product of memory, below science or philosophy, the products of the preëminent faculty, reason. Did Bacon believe that the historian could employ the inductive, experimental method and consequently achieve the certain and beneficial results of the natural scientist? We know that Bacon wished to break down the walls between the departments of knowledge. He believed that "moral and political philosophy" would "altogether lack profoundness, . . . unless natural philosophy be carried on and applied to particular sciences and particular sciences be carried back again to natural philosophy."⁷ More particularly, he asserted that the inductive method is applicable to some of the subject-matter of civil as well as natural history.

It may also be asked . . . whether I speak of natural philosophy only, or whether I mean that the other sciences, logic, ethics, and politics, should be carried on by this method. Now I certainly mean what I have said to be understood of them all; and as the common logic, which governs by the syllogism, extends not only to natural but to all sciences; so does mine also, which proceeds by induction, embrace everything. For I form a history and tables of discovery for anger, fear, shame, and the like; for matters political; and again for the mental operations of memory, composition and division, judgment and the rest; not less than for heat and cold . . . or the like.⁸

At the same time, Bacon often admitted that "Civil Knowledge is conversant about a subject which of all others is most immersed in matter, and hardliest reduced to axiom."⁹ He seems generally to have felt that scientific exactness in the treatment of civil affairs is impossible.¹⁰ Being so "immersed in matter," they are not open to the kind of investigation required in the discovery of "forms" for the benefit of mankind. It may be concluded that Bacon was more interested in extending the scope of the application of the inductive method, than in attacking the problem of whether civil history can be "scientific." His statements that it can be, sound like the indirect product of enthusiasm for his program of the natural sciences. His doubt concerning the reliability of history will be

⁷ *Works* 8. 112.

⁸ *Ibid.* 8. 159.

⁹ *Ibid.* 6. 347; cf. 6. 292; 9. 126, 232.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.* 6. 65-7; 9. 69.

further considered when we discuss his criticism of the function and value of historical examples.

Bacon's attitude toward the problem of attaining historical truthfulness may be approached more directly by examining his explicit statements on that subject and his relation with the work being done in his day to improve the resources and methods of the historical scholar. Protestations that history should be truthful are valueless without accompanying explanation. From classical times truthfulness had been acclaimed as the "first law of history," but by writers with such diverse basic philosophies that they virtually contradict each other. Truth to a mediaeval Christian chronicler meant theoretically something higher than adherence to fact. For simple annalists the statement that history should first of all be truthful was often no more than a naïve incantation to ward off error and adverse criticism. During the Renaissance the meaning of historical truthfulness was progressively particularized. Not only were religious and secular "truth" separated, but there were formulated, following the classics, increasingly explicit directions for the achievement of secular historical truthfulness.

Bacon belongs to this movement. The separation of religious and secular knowledge is, of course, fundamental to his whole philosophy. He is openly scornful of the incredibility of much ecclesiastical history.¹¹ He objects to universal histories, typical of the Middle Ages and still being composed in his own day, because ". . . the laws of regular history are so strict, that they can scarce be observed in such a wide field of matter. . . . For the writer who has such a variety of things on all sides to attend to, will become gradually less scrupulous on the point of information . . . ; he will take up with ruinous and popular reports. . . ." It is far better to "choose a manageable and definite argument, whereof a perfect knowledge and certainty

¹¹ *Ibid.* 6. 126: ". . . ecclesiastical history; which hath so easily received and registered reports and narrations of miracles . . . ; which though they had a passage for a time . . . ; yet . . . when the mists began to clear up, they grew to be esteemed as old wive's fables. . . ." Cf. 6. 29; 8. 94, 413.

Bacon's scorn was, of course, not novel. The case against the factual accuracy of ecclesiastical history had been stated even more pointedly by Vives, for example, a century before. Cf. *De disciplinis*, tr. Foster Watson, *Vives: On Education* (Cambridge, 1913), pp. 248-49.

and full information may be had. . . ."¹² Bacon seems also to have been distrustful of histories which cover a vast sweep of time because he saw with unusual clearness for his day the difficulty and necessity of attaining perspective in the writing of history.

For to carry the mind in writing back into the past, and bring it into sympathy with antiquity; diligently to examine, freely and faithfully to report, and by the light of words to place as it were before the eyes, the revolutions of times, the characters of persons, the fluctuations of counsels, the courses and currents of actions, the bottoms of pretences, and the streets of governments; is a task of great labour and judgment. . . .¹³

The importance of Bacon's ideas in this quotation is pointed by a comparison with the attitude of a contemporary historian,

¹² *Works* 8. 431, 425.

Bacon's criticism of universal history may well be original, but it is very like the opinion of Thomas Hobbes that Thucydides is superior to Dionysius of Halicarnassus because he took an argument that was "within his power well to handle. . . ." [*The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1843), 8. xxiii.] This similarity suggests the possibility that Bacon may have been influenced by Hobbes to include in the *De Augmentis* the discussion of the relative merits of universal and particular histories which is lacking in *The Advancement of Learning*. Hobbes' statement appears in the preface to his translation of Thucydides, which was published in 1629 but composed much earlier. ["it lay long by me," *English Works* 8. ix.] Aubrey seems to be the only source of our information about Hobbes' relation with Bacon: ". . . presumably between the chancellor's fall and his death (1621-1626), he [Hobbes] had been known to Bacon. Hobbes, according to Aubrey, wrote from Bacon's dictation, . . . and helped in turning some of his essays into Latin." [*DNB*, s.v. Hobbes.] At the same time it must be admitted that Aubrey's account is not perfectly clear in regard to dates, since he believed that Bacon and Hobbes were together at a time which was really two years after the former's death. [*Brief Lives*, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford, 1898), 1. 331.]

Another parallel is to be found in Francesco Patrizzi's *Della historia, dieci dialoghi*, Venetia, 1560. In his sixth dialogue, "Dell'Historia Universale" (especially p. 31b), Patrizzi observes that universal history is more difficult to compose accurately than particular history because the historians whose works must be used as sources are almost infinite in number, and because most of them are ignorant, biased, and lazy. This opinion was not in the part of the *Della historia* translated by Thomas Blundeville in 1574 as *The true order and Methode of wryting and reading Hystories*. There is, as a matter of fact, no explicit evidence that Bacon had read either the *Della historia* or Blundeville's partial version of it, although he did make use of some of Patrizzi's philosophical writings [cf. *Works* 2. 287; 5. 235-239, 259, 297; 7. 278, 321; 8. 504; 10. 453] and there are other important parallels, which will be pointed out later, between his and Patrizzi's theories of history-writing.

¹³ *Works* 8. 421.

Sir John Hayward, whose feeling for historical perspective was weakened by a fondness for rhetorical display and a desire to make his examples applicable to the current political situation.¹⁴ When Hayward's *Henrie IIII* (1599), with its pointed reference to the intrigues of Essex, aroused Elizabeth's anger, Bacon assured her that Hayward was guilty of felony rather than treason, "for he had taken most of the sentences of Cornelius Tacitus and translated them into English and put them into his text."¹⁵ And Coke, in the course of Hayward's two trials (1601 and 1602), drew from the defendant the statement that it "be lawfull for any historiographer to insert any historie of former tyme into that hystorie he wright albeit no other hystorian of that matter have meued the same. . . ."¹⁶

Although Bacon recognizes with unusual clarity that to compose a truthful history it is necessary "to carry the mind in writing back into the past, and bring it into sympathy with antiquity," he was not led thereby to take a serious interest in the problems of chronology. This was partly due to his conception of the utility of history, which, as we shall see, did not include a perception of the profit of studying the growth of ideas or institutions. In this respect he is like his Italian counterparts. For Machiavelli whatever is instructive is contemporary, and Patrizzi is concerned only with such details as how to narrate two or more groups of actions which take place at the same time.¹⁷ Bacon had little in common with those who were chiefly interested in chronology in his day, the adherents

¹⁴ Hayward's conception of the political utility of history was based on a belief in what may be called political patterns. That this was a rather commonplace conception is indicated by Professor Lily Bess Campbell in "The Use of Historical Patterns in the Reign of Elizabeth," *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1 (1937-38). 135-168.

¹⁵ *Works* 13. 341.

¹⁶ It was convenient for Hayward to say this, but there is no reason to think that he disbelieved it, since he continued the practice in later works. Coke, of course, was trying to get Hayward to confess that he had inserted and invented material in order to make his history point more directly at contemporary politics. Hayward defended himself by arguing that, on the contrary, he was simply following an accepted practice.

Coke's notes on the trial, including Hayward's answers, are preserved in *State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth*, vols. 274-75; the quotation has been taken from the summary by Margaret Dowling, "Sir John Hayward's Troubles over his Life of Henry IV," *The Library*, 11 (1930). 212-24.

¹⁷ *Della historia* (Venetia, 1560), pp. 61-63.

of the German Reformation; consequently few echoes are to be found in his writings of their long discussions of the Four Monarchies and of their attempts to synchronize secular and biblical systems of reckoning.¹⁸ He argues both for and against a Golden Age in "utmost antiquity."¹⁹ Occasionally he attempts to divide the past into periods of ignorance and enlightenment, and he had a hopeful belief in the greatness of his own age.²⁰ But these ideas are not developed or integrated with his theory of history-writing, which, in fact, demanded no careful attention to periodization of time.

The historian's evidence and its proper use, Bacon discusses briefly under the headings of Memorials and Antiquities. The evidence is composed of "*Commentaries*" (bare narratives "of actions and events without the causes and pretexts, . . . the counsels and orations"), "*Registers*" ("titles of things and persons in order of time, . . . or collections of public acts, such as edicts of princes, decrees of councils, judicial proceedings, public speeches, letters of state"), and "*Antiquities*" ("genealogies, annals, titles, monuments, coins, proper names and styles, etymologies of words, proverbs, traditions, archives and instruments as well public as private, fragments of histories scattered about in books not historical").²¹ Compared to the fullness of this list, Bacon's instructions in the use of evidence are scanty. It is in this respect, of course, that Bacon and others of his age are farthest from such present-day writers on history as Bernheim or Langlois and Seignobos, who are chiefly interested in the handling of documents. Bacon contents himself with remarking that by the use of the kind of evidence he has listed it is possible for the historian "to supersede the fabulous accounts of the origins of nations, and . . . fictions of that kind."²² It may be observed, incidentally, that Bacon's opposition to historical primitivism is typically humanistic, as is his ironical conclusion that antiquarianism is "entitled however to the less authority, because in things which few people concern themselves about, the few have it their own way."²³

¹⁸ Rather perfunctory references to Daniel's prophecy, the ages of the world, and the Four Monarchies are to be found in *Works* 6. 32; 8. 130; 9. 46, 310-11; 10. 67.

¹⁹ Cf. *Works* 5. 352-53; 6. 38-9; 13. 78-9.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 6. 130, 143; 8. 104, 110, 116-17, 128; 9. 343-44.

²¹ *Ibid.* 8. 423.

²² *Ibid.* 8. 424.

²³ *Idem.*

The problem of Bacon's relationship to the growing historical antiquarianism of his day is now raised, and it is made more urgent by the recent researches of Professor Marc Friedlaender,²⁴ who concludes that "... by 1625 the historical manuscripts and records of the period between the conquest and the reign of Henry VIII were largely recovered, deposited in a relatively few places of research, and easily available to the student who would use them."²⁵ Now although Bacon must have been aware of the activities that were leading to this result, and was indeed on intimate terms with antiquarians like Cotton, Camden, and Selden, as well as with Keepers of the Rolls, there is no evidence that he aided them or even fully realized the importance of their work. It is notable that he felt it proper to write his *History of Henry VII* (1621-22) while he was cut off from the most important depositories of documents except Cotton's and forced to rely chiefly on previous literary chronicles, Andrea, Vergil, Hall, Holinshed, Stow, and Speed.

As a matter of fact, Bacon sharply distinguished the labors of the research scholar from those of the historian, observing somewhat petulantly that a great inconvenience in historical composition in his time was the lack of adequate chronicles or catalogues of brute facts on which the historian could exercise his powers of interpretation and synthesis.

But unto me the disadvantage is great, finding no public memories of any consideration or worth, in sort that the supply must be out of the freshness of memory and tradition, and out of the acts, instruments, and negotiations of state themselves, together with the glances of foreign histories; which though I do acknowledge to be the best originals and instructions out of which to write an history, yet the travel must be much greater than if there had been already digested any tolerable chronicle as a simple narration of the actions themselves, which should only have needed out of the former helps to be enriched with the counsels and speeches and notable particularities.²⁶

It must be granted that Bacon wished the historian to work with facts, as many as can be accumulated; but in his discussion of history-writing the emphasis is always on the proper

²⁴ *Growth in the Resources for Studies in Earlier English History, 1534-1625*, University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, 1938; to be published.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁶ *Works* 11.35.

treatment of facts rather than on their collection. He creates the impression that, while it would be convenient to have more factual information, the most glaring lack is the skilful interpretation of the facts already available. It is probably this belief that made the writing of *Henry VII* without extensive preliminary research seem a justifiable undertaking.

There are only two pieces of evidence that cast doubt on the foregoing conclusion. The first is that Bacon chose to write on the reign of Henry VII rather than a more recent one. This may have some significance in view of the fact that it was the last reign for which documentary evidence was readily available, all later reigns depending on State Papers which were closely guarded. Greville and Fletcher, for example, were denied access to the Papers for the reign of Elizabeth, and Camden was allowed to use them only at the order of Burghley.²⁷ Bacon's choice of subject may be explained in other ways, however; by the fact, for instance, that Henry VII was his own prime minister and therefore furnished plentiful examples in his activities for the discussion of practical politics.

The second piece of contradictory evidence is the statement of John Selden, who was preëminently fitted to judge, that Bacon's history was notable, with Camden's, for being based on documentary evidence. "For, except onely the Annals of Queene *Elizabeth*, and the life and raigne of King *Henry* the VII. lately set forth by learned men of most excellling abilities, we have not so much as a publique piece of the Historie of England, that tastes enough either of the Truth or Plenty that may be gained from the Records of this Kingdome."²⁸ That Bacon's work was superior to many composed in or by his time must be admitted. Selden, indeed, must have been more conscious than we are of the multitude of flimsy epitomes, amorphous chronicles, and second-hand rhetorical histories that were flooding the market.²⁹ Consequently, the *History* of

²⁷ The evidence for these statements is fully presented by Professor Friedlaender, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-93.

²⁸ Prefatory letter to Augustine Vincent's *A Discoverie of Errours In the first Edition of the Catalogue of Nobility, Published by Ralphe Brooke, Yorke Herald, 1619 . . .* (London, 1622), fol. a, *verso*; quoted by Professor Friedlaender, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-89.

²⁹ For a survey of these kinds of histories, see Dr. Louis B. Wright, "The Eliza-

Henry VII may have seemed to him by comparison to be more scholarly than it really is. There appears to be no evidence that Bacon should be ranked with Camden in regard to historical research; and certainly he does not point in either theory or practice towards the group of later historians, of whom Selden was one, who made extensive use of the documentary sources then available.

That Bacon was more interested in other aspects of history-writing than research is further substantiated by an examination of his theory of the proper function and subject-matter of history. Bacon believed that the chief functions of history are to provide the materials for a realistic treatment of psychology and ethics, and to give instruction by means of example and analysis in practical politics. It is a commonplace that Bacon belongs with those Renaissance writers who sought to develop a natural science of morality. In recent times Professor M. W. Croll, for example, has discussed this matter in connection with his studies of prose style and its relation to climates of opinion.³⁰ And in the history of psychology Bacon has long been known as an "early advocate of a general science of man: a laborious collection of evidence about individuals [that] should result in a concept of man formed in a purely empirical fashion and designed to show the actual nature and limits of human capacity. This . . . reflects the influence of that movement toward scientific anthropology which had already begun."³¹ Now the important thing for us is that Bacon believed that the "wiser sort of historians" provide the best sort of materials for this new "science of man."

. . . the best provision and material for this treatise is to be gained from the wiser sort of historians, not only from the commemorations which they commonly add on recording the deaths of illustrious persons, but much more from the entire body of history as often as such a person enters upon the stage; for a charac-

bethan Middle-class Taste for History," *JMH* 3 (1931). 175-97; reprinted with slight changes in *Middle-class Culture in Elizabethan England*, University of North Carolina Press, 1935.

³⁰ See especially "Attic Prose: Lipsius, Montaigne, Bacon," *Schelling Anniversary Papers* (New York, 1923), pp. 117-50, and "Marc-Antoine Muret and Attic Prose," *PMLA* 39 (1924). 254-309.

³¹ G. S. Brett, *op. cit.* 2. 182.

ter so worked into the narrative gives a better idea of the man, than any formal criticism and review can; such is that of Africanus and Cato the Elder in Livy, of Tiberius, and Claudius, and Nero in Tacitus, of Septimius Severus in Herodian, of Louis XI., King of France, in Philip de Comines, of Ferdinand of Spain, the Caesar Maximilian, and the Popes Leo and Clement, in Francesco Guicciardini. For these writers, having the images of these persons whom they have selected to describe constantly before their eyes, hardly ever make mention of any of their actions without inserting something concerning their nature.³²

Among the "wiser sort of historians," who provided this valuable information about human nature, Bacon ranked highest Machiavelli and Tacitus. "We are much beholden to Machiavelli and others, that write what men do and not what men ought to do"; and although "many like the moral doctrines of Aristotle and Plato; . . . of Tacitus it may be said that he utters the very morals of life itself."³³ This kind of evidence reveals Bacon's sympathy with the reaction against the artificially adjusted and foreshortened biographical examples of virtuous or evil conduct which bulk so large in mediaeval and early Renaissance chronicles.³⁴ The first step in that reaction had been taken in England by writers like Sir Thomas More and Polydore Vergil, who attempted to organize their materials

³² *Works* 9. 217.

³³ *Ibid.* 6. 327; 7. 31. Compare Montaigne's commendation of Tacitus and Plutarch and his opinion that histories should be studied for their picture of human nature. "To some kind of men, it [history] is a meere gramaticall studie, but to others a perfect anatomie of Philosophie; by meanes whereof, the secretest part of our nature is searched-into." Plutarch is profitable because he imprints "not so much in his schollers mind the date of the ruine of Carthage, as the manners of Hanniball and Scipio, nor so much where Marcellus died, as because he was unworthy of his devoire he died there. . . ." [*Essays*, 1. xxv, Florio's translation.] "I know no author [than Tacitus], that in a publike register entermixeth so many considerations of manners, and particular inclinations . . . he had a more powerfull and attractive matter, to discourse and relate, then if hee had beene to speake or treat of battels and universal agitations. . . . It is a seminary of morall, and a magazine of polittique discourses, for the provision and ornament of those, that possesse someplace in the manageng of the world." [3. viii.]

³⁴ Examples of this kind persisted, of course, in the popular Renaissance epitomes and civic annals, and continued to receive theoretical defense in essays like Richard Braithwait's *The Schollers Medley* (1614), revised and enlarged as *A Survey of History* (1638). Braithwait's purpose was to discuss the art of writing history and to show the middle-class reader how to improve his business, manners, and conversation by studying histories. In the long run, the treatise on history-writing is swamped in a sea of examples and moralizing.

and make their examples more readily applicable by analyzing the character of a great tyrant as he rose to power and fell.³⁵ But the *de casibus* example even when handled with More's dramatic skill, is an artificially confining pattern.

What Bacon admired is the still more realistic, detailed, and relatively amoral kind of characterization that is exemplified in the histories of Machiavelli and Guicciardini and described theoretically in the essays of Patrizzi and Aconcio. Patrizzi, for example, argues that the historian should attempt a detailed anatomy of his character's mind. It is important for the historian to know and describe not only his subject's natural inclinations and controlling passion but also his training and experience, for the choices that a man makes are dictated by a customary habit of mind which is the product of natural endowments, early training, and later discipline. The reader receives a greater benefit from such a complete characterization since he cannot acquire another's innate qualities, but only those virtues which are the result of imitable education.³⁶ Aconcio's discussion of the proper use of historical examples is thoroughly realistic. He is not worried about the possible insidious influence upon the reader of examples of evil conduct;³⁷ instead he

³⁵ In Polydore Vergil's *English History* may be seen side by side three stages in the development of the biographical example. Early in the *History*, when Polydore is perforce following his mediaeval sources rather closely, there appears the story of Alfreda, the light dame with an eye for the main chance. She is portrayed as an unprincipled schemer who, after murdering her stepson Edward in order to further her own ambitions, suddenly repents, scourges herself, founds nunneries, and dies. The abrupt and (from a secular point of view) insufficiently motivated transformation in her character is typical of the mediaeval Christian method. This is an illustration, in Bacon's words, of what men ought to do rather than what they really do. A second stage is exemplified by Polydore's account of Gloucester's overthrow. Although Henry and Margaret are described to a certain extent as stock types, thereby suggesting that their characters were not completely historical but rather partly invented to provide a motivation for the subsequent action and a basis for the moral lesson, it must be granted that the characterization is more realistic and convincing than that of Alfreda. The more fully conceived portrait of Richard III is an example of a third stage. [Cf. *English History*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis, Camden Series, 29 (London, 1844). 70-73, 174-225; 36 (London, 1846). 248.]

³⁶ *Della historia*, pp. 47-48b, and for the English translation, Blundeville, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

Cf. Bacon, *Works* 9.218-19, where it is argued that "not only should the characters of dispositions which are impressed by nature be received . . . , but also those which are imposed on the mind" by external conditions.

³⁷ This was a much-debated problem among the early humanists. Probably the most widely read discussion of it was Simon Grynaeus' *De utilitate legendae his-*

emphasizes that if the reader is to make accurate and instructive comparisons between the present and the past, the historian must provide him with characterizations which are realistic and detailed. Otherwise the reader will "know nothing in the ende, but the discents, genealogies, and petygrees, of noble men, and when such a King or Emperour raigned, & such lyke stuffe. . . ."

Bacon in his treatment of ethics tried, likewise, to distinguish between ideals of conduct and the ways by which we may approach those ideals. The latter and more important aspect had been neglected, he felt, and for the same reason which accounts for the imperfection of all knowledge: men have preferred to dwell on final causes. He desired instead to analyze the psychological sources of our conduct.³⁹ Previous writers, he observes, have "made good and fair exemplars and copies, carrying the draughts and portraitures of Good, Virtue, Duty, Felicity; propounding them well described as the true objects and scopes of man's will and desires; but how to attain these excellent marks, and how to frame and subdue the will of man to become true and conformable to these pursuits, they pass it over altogether or slightly and unprofitably. . . . The reason of this omission I suppose to be . . . that men have despised to be conversant in ordinary and common matters. . . ." ⁴⁰ And it is the proper function of history to provide the materials for this practical study of ethics.

. . . the poets and writers of histories are the best doctors of this knowledge; where we may find painted forth with great life, how affections are kindled and incited; and how pacified and restrained; and how again contained from act and further degree; how they disclose themselves, how they work, how they vary, how they gather and fortify, how they are inwrapped one within another, and how they do fight and encounter one with another, and other the like peculiarities: amongst the which this last is of special use

toriae (Basle, 1531), which was reprinted in the *Artis historice penus* (1574), and frequently prefixed to historical works, such as Lodge's *Josephus* (1603) and Wilkin's *Justin* (1606).

³⁸ *The True order and Methode of wryting and reading Hystories* (London, 1574), pp. 59-60.

³⁹ Cf. Harald Höffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, tr. B. E. Meyer (London, 1900), 1. 206.

⁴⁰ *Works* 6. 309-10.

in moral and civil matters; how (I say) to set affection against affection, and to master one by another . . . upon which foundation is erected the excellent use of *praemium* and *poena*, whereby civil states consist. . . .⁴¹

This approach to the good life through the realistic analysis of human nature by historians and others is concerned not only with the individual, it will be observed, but also with society as a whole. Histories, that is, should contain the kind of instruction in politics that will promote civic happiness. In this respect, also, Bacon is in sympathy with Machiavelli and his classical models—Tacitus, Polybius, and Thucydides—⁴² and is like them opposed to the rhetorical and moralistic conception of history-writing. Machiavelli had explicitly stated in the *Proemio* that his *Istorie fiorentine* was meant to provide more profitable political instruction than the rhetorical narratives of his predecessors, Bruni and Poggio. ‘When I examined their writings carefully,’ he says, ‘I discovered that although they had indeed been most circumstantial in their account of the foreign wars waged by the Florentines, they had treated the internal political history of Florence so briefly as to afford the reader neither profit nor pleasure.’ In very nearly the same words, Bacon condemns the rhetorical historian’s preoccupation with wars and military show, and calls for a study of policy. “For they be not the great wars and conquests . . . the rehearsal of which maketh the profitable and instructing history; but rather times refined in policies and industries, new and rare variety of accidents and alterations, equal and just encounters of state and state in forces and of prince and prince in sufficiency, that bring upon the stage the best parts for observation.”⁴³ Similarly, he argues that “it not a little

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 6. 337-38.

The ideas in this statement were not altogether novel. They are reminiscent, for example, of Juan Vives’ opinion that the most profitable histories are those which clearly reveal “what the human passions are: how they are aroused, how quelled”; because when that is known, rulers possess an instrument with which they can sway their subjects and carry out their plans, and citizens have the key to rational happiness. *De disciplinis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-33.

⁴² It is significant that only in Bacon’s time were these classical historians receiving the attention that had earlier been given to writers, like Valerius Maximus and Sallust, who emphasized the moral and theatrical in their histories.

⁴³ *Works* 11. 35.

embases the authority of a history to intermingle matters of lighter moment, such as triumphs, ceremonies, spectacles, and the like, with matters of state.”⁴⁴

In Bacon’s judgment, that is, the true dignity and worth of history spring not from theatrical subject-matter but from political examples and analysis. It was with this criterion in mind that he selected the period of English history from the Union of the Roses to the Union of the Crowns as the most fit and profitable for study, for it contains a “rare variety of accidents and alterations” in ecclesiastical, legal, political, and military affairs.⁴⁵ And it was for this reason that he asserted that the historian should summarize the laws of the period he was treating and attempt to interpret them in the light of contemporary conditions.

. . . it is some defect even in the best writers of history, that they do not often enough summarily deliver and set down the most memorable laws that passed in the times whereof they write, being indeed the principal acts of peace. For though they may be had in original books of law themselves; yet that informeth not the judgment of kings and counsellors and persons of estate so well as to see them described and entered in the table and portrait of the times.⁴⁶

It is clear, then, that Bacon was in agreement with those writers who felt that the historian could increase the utility of his work by presenting a more realistic and detailed exposition of political or ethical problems. It is not clear, however, that his sense of realism led him, like some of those same writers, to question the belief that history actually is instructive. The theory of *Historia, magister vitae* rested on the assumption that human nature remains essentially constant and that situations repeat themselves. This assumption was finally being

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 8. 432.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 6. 192-93; 8. 427-28; 9. 36-37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 11. 147-48. Bacon felt, however, that “many laws were of a more private and vulgar nature than ought to detain the reader of history.” [11. 239.] Even so he was more liberal than Hayward, who argued that it is “improper for a true carry’d History” to contain a report of any Parliamentary acts except those which “occasion Tumults or Divisions, or some remarkable Alteration in State . . . albeit a noble Writer in our time [undoubtedly Bacon] esteems it to be a main in History that the Acts of Parliament should not be recited. . . .” [*Edward the Sixth*, in White Kennet’s *Complete History of England* (London, 1706), 2. 290.]

examined. Patrizzi, for example, after predicating that the greatest possible happiness comes from living in a peaceful and well-ordered society, asks whether it is really possible for men to draw lessons from history which will help them to attain this social felicity.⁴⁷ Guicciardini, likewise, had doubts, about our ability to really understand the past and about the value of general political principles derived from history. He attacked Machiavelli's *Discorsi* on the ground that lessons deduced from the political experience of the Romans must be arbitrary and dogmatic.⁴⁸ It is a great mistake, he remarks elsewhere,⁴⁹ to speak of events generally and absolutely, because by reason of the variety of circumstances almost all have distinctions and exceptions. Hence they deceive themselves who try to make instructive comparisons between the present government and that of Rome; their analogies must always be imperfect because the conditions then and now are not identical.⁵⁰

Bacon's position in regard to this problem is not perfectly clear and consistent. Like Guicciardini, he felt, as we have seen, that because civil affairs are so "immersed in matter" they can scarcely be reduced to axioms. Nevertheless, he believed in the inspiring and instructive force of historical examples.⁵¹ His writings abound in examples from the past, many of them used in a shockingly uncritical and unhistorical fashion. Examples valuable only as illustration are made the basis for extended arguments, with complete disregard for the most elementary rules of logic and historical perspective.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Della historia*, pp. 49-51, 53-54.

⁴⁸ In *Considerazioni intorno ai Discorsi Machiavelli sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*.

⁴⁹ *Ricordi*, serie seconda, 110, 111, 114, in *Scritti politici e ricordi*, a cura di Roberto Palmarocchi (Bari, 1933), pp. 308-09.

⁵⁰ The value of history was also questioned, of course, by the early Renaissance skeptics, who foreshadowed the contemptuous attitude of the Enlightenment; but their criticisms took the form of a general disbelief in the possibility of historical truthfulness. Cornelius Agrippa, for instance, denies that histories are valuable by way of example, since they are nothing but lies. [*De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio* (1530), Cap. V.] For references to Charles de la Rulle (*Succintz adversaries contre l'histoire et professeurs d'icelle*, Poitier, 1573) and others, see Dr. John L. Brown, *The Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem: A Critical Study* (Washington, D. C., 1939), pp. 162-168.

⁵¹ See statements to this effect in *Works* 6.101, 102; 11.43; 13.183, 300.

⁵² The most notorious instances of the misuse of historical examples are to be found in the first book of *The Advancement of Learning*. Cf. *Works* 6.98-105, 146-162.

While Bacon's comment upon the method of Machiavelli's *Discorsi* is in some respects more profound than Guicciardini's, it is less severe. He argues that historical examples have supplanted ancient fables for the conveyance of practical wisdom, and that

therefore the form of writing which of all others is fittest for this variable argument of negotiations and occasions is that which Machiavel chose wisely and aptly for government; namely, *discourses upon histories or examples*. For knowledge drawn freshly and in our view out of particulars knoweth the best way to particulars again. And it hath much greater life for practice when the discourse attendeth upon the example, than when the example attendeth upon the discourse. . . . For when the example is the ground, being set down in an history at large, it is set down with all circumstances, which may sometimes control the discourse thereupon made and sometimes supply it, as a very pattern for action; whereas the examples alleged for the discourse's sake are cited succinctly and without particularity, and carry a servile aspect toward the discourse which they are brought in to make good.⁵³

This admirably sound warning against historical rationalizing was as far as Bacon ever went in his criticism of the use of examples from the past. He was unable to go beyond the general opinion of his time and suggest, for instance, that it is more useful to study the origin and development of institutions and beliefs than to try to model one's conduct on historical examples.

To modern minds, one of the most interesting solutions to the difficulty raised by the questioning of the utility of historical examples was that suggested, if not developed, by Jean Bodin. An important purpose of Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566)⁵⁴ was to discover some method or order in the apparent diversity of human experience which will

⁵³ *Works* 6. 359.

⁵⁴ The *Methodus* was fairly well known in England. Thomas Heywood translated the fourth book as a preface to his English version of Sallust's *Catiline* (1608), and it was used or referred to by such writers as William Harrison (1587), John Stow (1580), Sir Philip Sidney (1580), Thomas Nashe (1596), Edmund Bolton (c. 1618), and Degory Whear (1623). Bacon, consequently, probably knew the *Methodus*, but he never mentions Bodin by name and gives no sign of appreciating the novelty and relative profundity of some of Bodin's ideas.

See the present writer's article, "Bodin's *Methodus* in England before 1625," forthcoming in *Studies in Philology*.

justify the reading and writing of history. This is apparent in the first chapter of the *Methodus*, where Bodin divides history into four kinds: divine, mathematical, natural, and human. Of these different kinds only human history is wholly confused and mutable; the others are unchanging and certain. The student of human history, therefore, needs to orient himself in the midst of diversity by finding fixed points of reference. Bodin essays to discover these fixed points by determining the relation of human with divine history through a study of religions, and with natural history through a study of geography and climates. In short, Bodin tries to explain human institutions and man, and to find some uniformity in the welter of events by examining the inter-relations of the human will with divine and natural forces.

This solution, however, does not seem to have made much of an impression upon Bacon or other Renaissance historians and theorists. Dependence upon the belief in the certainty of divine providence had already, as we have observed, been largely abandoned as impracticable; and there are few echoes of Bodin's theory of the influence of climate. Instead, it is generally decided that situations really do repeat themselves and that a study of history can be truly useful if causes and circumstances are presented in sufficient detail to permit accurate comparisons to be made between the present and the past. Thus, essays like Patrizzi's *Della historia* are largely composed of patterns for the guidance of historians in constructing narratives that will be fuller and therefore more instructive than the usual bare chronicle of events. Be careful to observe and include this and this, says Patrizzi, for they are the things which are essentially constant and instructive when described in accurate detail. It was this kind of material which Blundeville thought expedient to translate rather than Patrizzi's neoplatonic philosophizing and academic arguments. Likewise, those classical historians who placed the greatest stress upon the interpretation of causes and circumstances became more popular during the later Renaissance. Camden, for example, follows Polybius in stating that

Circumstances I have not in the least omitted, that not only the Events of Affairs, but also the Reasons and Causes thereof, might be understood. That of *Polybius* pleases me mightily. *Take away*

from *History, Why, How, and To what end*, things have been done, and Whether the thing done has succeeded according to Reason; and all that remains will rather be an idle Sport and Foolery, than a profitable Instruction: and tho' for the present it may delight, for the future it cannot profit.⁵⁵

With these ideas Bacon is in complete agreement. He finds the full, consecutive narrative of Tacitus more persuasive than the disconnected biographical examples of Suetonius.

For as when I read in Tacitus the actions of Nero or Claudius, with circumstances, inducements, and occasions, I find them not so strange; but when I read them in Suetonius Tranquillus gathered into titles and bundles, and not in order of time, they seem more monstrous and incredible. . . .⁵⁶

"Above all things," insists Bacon, "(for this is the ornament and life of Civil History) I wish events to be coupled with their causes. . . ." ⁵⁷ Because they lack this quality, Bacon condemns epitomes, so popular in his day, as the "corruptions and moths of histories, . . . base and unprofitable dregs."⁵⁸ Similarly, commentaries are history unfinished since they merely "set down a bare continuance and tissue of actions without the causes and pretexts, the commencements and occasions, the counsels and orations. . . ." ⁵⁹ Of a like nature, but more penetrating, is Bacon's criticism of chroniclers and annalists on the ground that they attribute to their subject-matter an un-historical dignity and fail to paint a realistic and useful picture because they consider it inelegant to look for hidden or commonplace motives. This kind of composition, he says,

. . . represents the magnitude of public actions, and the public faces and deportments of persons, but omits and covers up in silence the smaller passages and motions of men and matters. But such being the workmanship of God, that he hangs the greatest weights upon the smallest wires, it comes commonly to pass that such a history, pursuing the greater things alone, rather sets forth the pomp and solemnity of business than the true and inward springs and resorts thereof. Moreover, when it does add and insert the counsels and motives, yet from its love of grandeur it introduces into human actions more gravity and prudence than they really

⁵⁵ Preface to the *Annals of the Reign of Elizabeth* (1588), in white Kennett, *op. cit.* 2. 362.

⁵⁶ *Works* 6. 235.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 8. 419.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 8. 424.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 8. 423.

have; so that a truer picture of human life may be found in a satire than in some histories of this kind.⁶⁰

Equally searching for his time is Bacon's estimate of the value of histories which are more than national in scope. Although he was skeptical, as we have seen, of a writer's ability to maintain strict truthfulness in a universal history, he recognized that "the affairs of men are not so far separated by the divisions of empires or countries, but they have a connexion in many things; and therefore it is certainly of use to have the fates, acts, and destinies of one age described and contained as it were on one tablet."⁶¹

It scarcely needs to be said of Bacon, considering the direction of his whole philosophy, that his conception of causation is human rather than supernatural. The possibility of divine control is not denied but is effectually ignored by being relegated to a separate historical category, the History of Providence and of Prophecies and their accomplishments.⁶² There is little profit in this kind of narrative except, perhaps, to frighten a few wicked persons. The utility of history springs rather from a realistic analysis of human actions and motives.

Bacon's analysis of causes was realistic, however, in only a narrow sense. It has been remarked before⁶³ that in the *History of Henry VII* Bacon explains events almost wholly by an interpretation of personal motives, and neglects social and economic causes. It may be said of him as of his model Machiavelli, that he "was lacking in the discernment of hidden causes . . . the development of practical interests—of trade and commerce, mechanics and agriculture—and the way in which those new interests and the new social stratification which they represented had grown strong enough to take an essential part in determining the politics of modern times,—all this escaped

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 8. 424-25.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 8. 430-31. The absence of patriotic bias in Bacon's theory of history-writing is notable. Although it was generally admitted that such a bias was the cause of much untruthfulness in historical composition, writers from Grafton to Bolton continued to ask for a more glorious and exclusive history of England. The chauvinistic attack on Polydore Vergil and others who questioned national legends has often been noticed. Cf. Edwin Greenlaw, "The Battle of the Books," *Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932.

⁶² *Ibid.* 8. 436-37. Bacon likewise, attributes little power to Fortune; cf. 6. 331, 362, 370, 377; 8. 87; 9. 278, 287-88; 14. 85-86.

⁶³ "Bacon as a Historian," *TLS* (April 8, 1926), p. 254.

him, dominated as he was by his formal conception of politics as a play of intrigue and a struggle for power.”⁶⁴

Neither did Bacon perceive that emphasis on the interpretation of hidden causes and motives opens the way to the introduction of fiction, no matter how plausible, into ostensibly factual histories. Such a perception was rare in Bacon's time. Sidney's refreshingly caustic criticism, for example, springs from his special bias as a defender of poetry against the conventional eulogy of history. "Manie times he [the historian] must tell events whereof he can yeeld no cause, and if he do, it must be poetically."⁶⁵ It was enough for Bacon and other theorists if the causes and motives adduced were probable; and probability, it was felt, could be secured most surely through practical experience rather than through research. "It is not . . . closet penmen that we are to look for guidance in such a case; . . . [but] those who have handled the helm of government, and been acquainted with the difficulties and mysteries of state business."⁶⁶

The aspects of history-writing that have been discussed in the foregoing paragraphs were the only ones with which Bacon concerned himself. He was clearly one of the most important English advocates of what may be called the Polybian or Florentine theory of history-writing. The adherents of this theory held certain beliefs in common which set them off more or less distinctly from the chroniclers, the rhetoricians, and the antiquarians. They denounced rhetorical excesses and advocated a more realistic and analytical treatment of the past. They believed that the utility of historical narratives should be increased by more penetrating political and psychological analyses rather than by the methods of the dramatist or the cloistered scholar. They associated history-writing with political theory rather than with oratory or research, and they studied the past not so much to find examples with which to enforce conventional morality as to learn what is politically expedient. History, to them, was a form of didactic literature concerned with the difficult art of political administration.

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⁶⁴ Höffding, *op. cit.* 1. 24.

⁶⁵ *The Defense of Poesie, The Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge, 1923), 3. 12.

⁶⁶ *Works* 11. 443.

